

Orientation to the Honors Thesis Seminar

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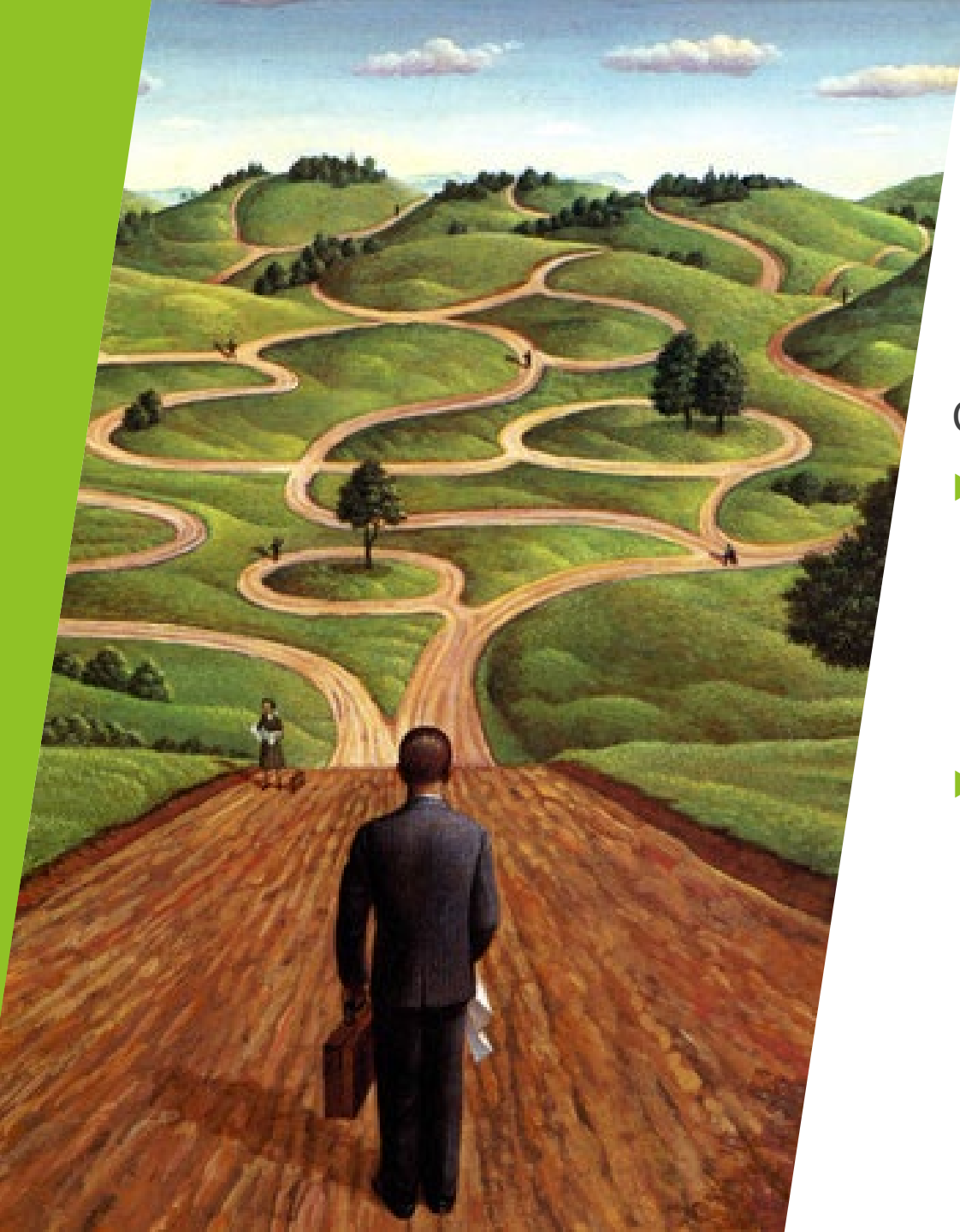
Overview

- ▶ What is research?
- ▶ What do we do in an honors thesis class?
- ▶ What does a strong research proposal look like?
 - ❖ Viable Research Question
 - ❖ Academic Literature and the Sociological Conversation
 - ❖ Methods: Access to Research Sites, Interviewees, Data
- ▶ Questions about you
 - ▶ What topic is of interest to you?
 - ▶ What might be a preliminary research question?

What is research?

Research involves

- ▶ Identifying a topic of interest
- ▶ Asking a question about it (this is your research question)
- ▶ Gathering data through sociological methods to answer your question
 - ▶ Methods include
 - ▶ Interviews
 - ▶ Ethnography
 - ▶ Document analyses
 - ▶ Statistical analyses
- ▶ Writing up your findings
- ▶ Findings should add substantive knowledge to your field of inquiry



What We Do in the Thesis Class

Our Expectations

- ▶ We understand that for most, this is your first lengthy research project
 - ▶ The path of research is not straight and narrow, but a winding road
- ▶ Class is designed to structure/guide your journey
 - ▶ The research is your own project
 - ▶ Intellectually intense experience

Organization of Class

- ▶ Research process broken down into smaller steps
 - ▶ Assignments due every 2-3 weeks
- ▶ First semester assignments:
 - ▶ Research statement
 - ▶ What is your question
 - ▶ Why is it important
 - ▶ Annotated bibliography (brief summaries of relevant literature, submitted every 2 weeks)
 - ▶ Literature review (what is known about your topic)
 - ▶ Research methods (what, how, where)
 - ▶ Research prospectus (12-15 page research proposal)

Elements of a Strong Research Proposal

What is a research proposal?



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Initial Research Question


- ▶ Most students begin with an interest in a topic
- ▶ Initial question may be very broad
- ▶ Read! READ!! READ!!!

As you learn more about your topic

- ❖ Ask yourself questions about the topic
- ❖ Look for gaps in the literature, e.g.,
 - Is there a question without a satisfactory answer?
 - Is there earlier research that should be updated?
 - Is there research from one context that could be explored in a new context?
- ▶ It takes time to narrow an interest in a topic into feasible research question

Viabile Research Questions

- ▶ Sociologically significant
 - ▶ What are the social issues/questions embedded in your research topic?
 - ▶ Beware the siren calls of psychology
- ▶ Project needs to be empirically grounded
 - ▶ Purely theoretical questions are not honors thesis research questions
- ▶ Make sure you can find the resources/data to answer your question
- ▶ Project can be completed in 9 months
- ▶ Project needs 30 - 50 pages to be fully explored
 - ▶ Not 10 pages, not 300 pages
- ▶ How, Why, What questions are more promising than Do questions
 - ▶ Simple, straightforward questions are often the best
- ▶ **If you think you know the full answer to your research question now, find another question**



The Role of Literature In Shaping Your Question

Research question should enter a larger sociological conversation

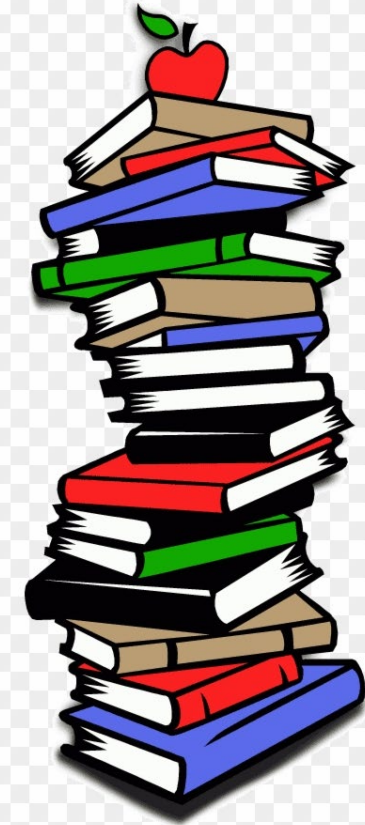
- ▶ What different fields inform your question?
- ▶ What do other scholars say about your topic?
- ▶ What *don't* other scholars say about your topic?
- ▶ What is your topic a case of?
 - ▶ May frame your research as a case study of a larger issue
- ▶ Narrow your question by looking for gaps, silences, inconsistencies/disagreements in the literature
- ▶ What are the sociological implications of your topic? (the last step)

Read broadly to figure out what interests you specifically

Talk to a librarian about your topic of interest, get references

Check out the “Subject Librarians” under the “Get Help” tab on the UCB library homepage

- Ann Glusker (Sociology) glusker@Berkeley.edu
- Corliss Lee (Ethnic Studies) clee@library.berkeley.edu
- Lillian Castillo-Speed (Chicanx/Latinx Studies) csl@library.berkeley.edu
- Margaret Phillips (Gender and Women’s Studies) margaret.phillips@berkeley.edu



Methods



- ▶ You should have some idea how you will gather the data you need to answer your question
 - ▶ Different methods best address different questions
 - ▶ Interviews best capture what people think
 - ▶ Ethnographic studies best capture what people actually do
- ▶ Can you get access
 - ▶ To an appropriate site
 - ▶ People to interview
 - ▶ Precautions for Vulnerable Groups
 - ▶ Archival material
 - ▶ Data bases

Research and Analysis of Findings Take Place During the Second Semester

- ▶ Must complete a research proposal of acceptable quality in H190A to be admitted to H190B
- ▶ H190B is a 5-unit class
 - ▶ Intensity of work increases
 - ▶ Be prepared to take a lighter load of classes or lessen outside commitments
- ▶ H190B meets on **Tuesdays**

Grade based on quality of thesis but also on your class performance

- ▶ Attend class (get there on time)
- ▶ Timely submission of work
- ▶ “Seminar Culture”
 - ▶ Collaborative classroom
 - ▶ Listen to and respect classmates
 - ▶ Take your own and your classmates work seriously
 - ▶ Peer editing

Will you enjoy this journey?

- ▶ **The honors thesis class is a huge commitment!**
 - ▶ Are you prepared to devote the time the project will need?
 - ▶ Are you willing to reduce other commitments?
 - ▶ Be honest!



If you're ready for the challenge....

- ▶ **Submit a preliminary proposal for comment and advice**
 - ▶ 3 - 5 pages
 - ▶ Includes at least 3 academic references
 - ▶ Due June 6
- ▶ Follow the advice given on your preliminary proposal
- ▶ Make an appointment with a librarian
- ▶ Final proposal due July 15

